Front Country Trails
Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

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AGENDA DATE: March 2, 2011

TO: Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

FROM: Jill E. Zachary, City of Santa Barbara. Assistant Parks and Recreation Director

SUBJECT: **Trail Assessment Project Update**

RECOMMENDATION: That the Front Country Trails (FCT) Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force receives a status report on the Trail Assessment Project.

DISCUSSION:

Overview

The purpose of this staff report is to provide the Task Force with an update and preliminary results of the Trail Assessment Project. The purpose of the trail assessment was to provide detailed information about current conditions of the front country trails, the extent to which they meet existing Forest Service guidelines, and options for improving the trails through regular maintenance and/or trail reconstruction. The data collection portion of the project was complete at the end of January. FCT staff will be analyzing the data over the next few months. A detailed presentation and recommendations will be provided to the Task Force at the June 1, 2011, meeting. The table attached to this report provides a summary of conditions for 38.3 miles of trail.

Background

The 2008 FCT Management Recommendations call for an assessment of existing trail use and trail conditions for a number of reasons. Knowledge of existing trail conditions and use are important first steps in developing a trail management and maintenance program. Information gathered regarding trail use and trail conditions also contribute to the development of trail guidelines and trail use designations.

Work toward conducting a trail assessment began in fall 2008 when a number of trails stakeholders and agency staff participated in a two-day Uniform Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) training conducted by Beneficial Designs. Following the training, a pilot UTAP project was initiated for Cold Spring Trail. The pilot assessment was conducted from November 2009 to February 2010. Although the assessment provided

valuable information, it required a significant amount of time for 2.5 miles of trail. Limited staff and volunteer resources, as well as the desire to obtain the data in a more timely fashion, resulted in the recommendation to contract with Beneficial Designs to complete the assessment using the automated High Efficiency Trail Assessment Process (HETAP). The FCT Task Force concurred with this recommendation at the June 2, 2010, regular meeting.

The scope of work with Beneficial Designs was finalized in September 2010, and funding for the project was secured in December 2010. The trail assessment was completed by Jeremy Vlcan over a 12-day period in January 2011. Mr. Vlcan has extensive trail assessment experience, provides training in both the UTAP and the HETAP trail assessment methods, and engages in trail building and maintenance projects.

Trail Assessment Parameters

Beneficial Designs was asked to conduct the trail assessment using the following trail parameters and to measure drop-off and step-out whenever the trail tread width was less than 24 inches.

Trail Feature	Trail Feature Definition	Measurement (inches)
Design Tread Width	Width of clear path of travel.	24
Minimum Clearance Width	Minimum width of trail that occurs within boundary on both sides of trail; may be the same or less than design tread width.	24
Design Height	Vertical height of clear path of travel; measured from trail bed to over head.	120
Minimum Obstruction Height	Height or depth of obstruction (e.g. rock or stump) found in the path of travel, as measured from the trail surface; minimum height to be considered a barrier to a user.	12

Data collection also included other trail features such as grade, slope, surface type, drainage, and entrenchment. The HETAP software generates a series of comprehensive reports that can then be used to prioritize and direct trail maintenance activities and provide information to the public about trail conditions. Reports provide the following types of information:

- Typical trail surface, width, grade and cross slope
- Surface type (soil, rock) and whether it is very soft, soft, firm or hard
- Grade of trail in ranges
- Locations where the trail does not meet the minimum clearance width
- Locations on the trail where there are overhead obstructions and the type of obstruction (vegetation) and whether maintenance will remove the obstruction

- Locations on the trail where there are trail obstructions, the type of obstruction (rock or vegetation) and whether maintenance will address the obstruction
- Areas and length of the trail where the trail is entrenched and eroding

Field Work

Trail assessment data was collected over a ten-day period, beginning on Friday, January 21, and ending on Sunday, January 30. During this time, Jeremy Vlcan covered over 38 miles of trail. To facilitate transportation and increase efficiency, the trail assessment was generally conducted from the top to the bottom of each trail. A number of agency staff as well as trails stakeholders either accompanied Jeremy on the trails or assisted with transportation to and/or from the trailhead. Field data was verified at the end of each day.

Summary Table

The summary tables attached to this report provide an overview of some key conditions on the trail. The tables based on an extensive data set with information about the entire length of each trail. The first table provides information about both the road and trail portions of each trail. The second table does not include the data for the road portions of each trail that includes roads. These tables are draft.

Additional data, not shown in the table, includes the location and size of features such as obstructions (trees, brush, rocks), signs, waterbars, step outs, drop-offs, trail entrenchment, switchbacks, creek crossings, walls, and steps. As an example, the Romero Trail data includes 212 stations with information about tread width, cross slope, grade, surface and location. The Romero Trail data also has 143 recorded features.

Trail Access Information – Education and Outreach

The trail assessment data is used to create trail access information (TAI) signs and TAI summary sheets. The TAI signs are printed on adhesive stickers and attached to carsonite posts at key points on the trail in order to inform the trail user of the trail conditions (including trail tread width, grade, cross slope, surface and obstructions). These signs are located at trailheads and at key intersections or locations on the trail where there is a change in conditions. FCT staff has identified as many as 30 locations where such signs could be installed. A sample TAI sign will be available at the Task Force meeting.

The TAI summary sheets also provide similar information about the trail conditions. Additional information can also be included so that the summary sheet provides trail users with a range of information about trail conditions, safety, etiquette, and hazards. It is anticipate that these summary sheets would be made available online. A draft summary sheet will be provided at the Task Force Meeting.

Next Steps

As discussed above, FCT staff needs to further review and analyze the trail assessment data in order to provide the Task Force and public with detailed information about each trail as well as a range of options for trail maintenance and management. That work will be complete for the June 1st Task Force meeting. At that time, the draft signage and trail summary fact sheets will also be complete. A community meeting may also be scheduled in addition to the Task Force meeting,

ATTACHMENT: Trail Assessment Summary Tables